

**U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development, and Research**

**Testimony Presented by Berks County Pennsylvania Commissioner Judith L.
Schwank
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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss how conservation programs initiated in prior Farm Bills have worked in Pennsylvania. I am also pleased to discuss my ideas on the future direction of national policy on conservation practices.

I am a County Commissioner in Berks County, Pennsylvania. Currently, I serve as Chair of the Energy, Environment and Land Use Committee of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) and have been the Commissioner Director of the Berks County Conservation District for six years. Prior to my role as County Commissioner I served as an Agricultural Extension Educator for Penn State Cooperative Extension for almost 20 years. In addition, I spent 7 years on a dairy farm. I am a strong advocate for the agricultural economy in my county as well as the state of Pennsylvania.

Agriculture is big business in Pennsylvania. Our cash receipts total over \$4 billion from production agriculture. The entire food and fiber system, which includes food processing, marketing, transport and farm equipment, etc., agriculture contributes almost \$45 billion to Pennsylvania's economy. We have over 59,000 farm families who are the stewards of over 7.7 million acres of farmland. As you can tell from the statistics, our farms are small by mid-west standards but our production rivals any other major agriculture state. We have implemented a successful Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. State government in tandem with county and some federal funding have helped to permanently protect over 300, 000 acres of land and preserved 2,750 farms.

Our agriculture is diverse; while dairy predominates we are leading mushroom growers as well as poultry and egg producers. From small organic vegetable farmers to the equine industry, there are many agricultural opportunities in our state. A strong agricultural economy has helped to create a healthier rural economy. This is in no small measure a tribute to the success of past Farm Bill conservation efforts such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), which has provided a welcome boost to wildlife habitat improvement. This in turn has enhanced tourism efforts in Pennsylvania for hunting and fishing. EQIP has provided welcome assistance to farmers who wish to implement conservation efforts on actively productive land. The Conservation Security Program has also been a success in Pennsylvania.

There is much more to be done to help our farmers not only be productive but to attain a sustainable farm income without degrading the natural resources that rural as well as

urban citizens depend on. Farm Bill policies and programs instituted in 2007 could make the difference for the future of agriculture in Pennsylvania.

Driving to today's hearing, I traversed the Susquehanna River Basin. I passed through verdant farmland with plenty of creeks and rivers and woodlands. Conservation efforts to protect our soil and waterways were visible even to the untrained eye. We know however, that these practices are not once and done events. Conservation of our natural resources must become a way of life for our farmers. They will need adequate resources to attain the goals they and we have set for them.

Agriculture is facing intense scrutiny from the public regarding farming practices. The connection between farm practices and the decline of water and air quality are very visible and noticeable to the non-farm rural and urban population. I have had citizens request that the county not preserve land where biosolids are applied. They associate the land application of bio-solids with air and water pollution as well as soil contamination. They are very aware that their tax dollars are being used to support agriculture and they are demanding a role in determining how those dollars will be spent.

Past efforts to support conservation efforts have worked well to varying degrees. Now more than ever it is imperative that investments in conservation practices must be increased for the sustainability of agriculture in Pennsylvania.

Here are some of the most urgent needs for consideration in the 2007 Farm Bill:

1. Expand conservation technical assistance efforts to farms of all sizes and types. Each type of farming enterprise has unique impacts on the environment that can be mitigated by appropriate best management practices.
2. Increase funding for technical assistance. Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Conservation District offices are woefully understaffed and cannot implement some of the most critical conservation programs in a timely manner.
3. Integrate conservation programs and provide better training coordination among federal, state, and local agencies as well as the land-grant universities. Enhance outreach to technical service providers and independent contractors who serve farmers. This will ensure better practices and compliance.
4. Monitor the implementation of conservation practices and document results. Emphasize their impact on all residents not just the rural population. Encourage small as well as large-scale practices that can make a long-term difference in resource conservation.
5. Expand the Conservation Security Program to include more critical watersheds. If fully funded, this program has the opportunity to dramatically improve farm sustainability and natural resources in a more visible manner to the general public.
6. Enhance technical assistance for the use of biomass for fuel and energy generation from animal waste. There is opportunity for farms of all sizes throughout the country in energy generation and we should be encouraging practices that do not degrade the environment.

7. Fund conservation efforts for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed through the Farm Bill to ensure that this critical watershed area that serves millions of people becomes a permanent effort.

Farm policy that successfully integrates modern production practices without degrading water, soil and air is imperative and possible with a firm commitment by Congress to fully funding conservation efforts. I urge to enhance funding for conservation in the 2007 Farm Bill. The future of our agricultural economy and the well being of our natural environment is dependent on us.